

26 October 2023

## Frequently Asked Questions Shark Meshing Program

### Joint Management Agreement and Management Plan for the Shark Meshing (Bather Protection) Program

The Shark Meshing Program (SMP) is authorised by and managed in accordance with the 2017 Joint Management Agreement and underpinned by the 2023 Management Plan.

---

#### What is the Shark Meshing (Bather Protection) Program?

The NSW Shark Meshing (Bather Protection) Program (SMP) was introduced on some Sydney beaches in 1937 in response to community concern about the number of shark bites, many of which were fatal. The program has expanded over time to cover 51 of the State's most popular bathing beaches between Newcastle and Wollongong. Between 1 September and 30 April each year, DPI contractors deploy nets below the surface in about 10 to 12 metres of water, within 500 metres from shore. The nets are 150 metres long by 6 metres deep and have a mesh size of 60 cm.

---

#### What is the Joint Management Agreement?

The Minister may enter into a Joint Management Agreement (JMA) with one or more public authorities for the management, control, regulation or restriction of an action that may impact threatened species, populations or ecological communities.

The SMP has been successful in reducing the number of shark bites at meshed beaches but has an environmental impact on threatened marine species and is listed as a key threatening process under the State's threatened species legislation; the *Fisheries Management Act 1994* and the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*. The SMP aims to find a balance between providing an important public safety measure while reducing environmental impacts. In 2009, the Government reviewed the SMP and introduced new management arrangements for the program. From August 2009 until 2017, the program was authorised by and managed in accordance with two JMAs: one under the *Fisheries Management Act 1994*, and the second under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*. The agreements were underpinned by a Management Plan. The agreements and plan were developed between DPI, EHG (the Environment and Heritage Group within the Department of Planning), the Fisheries Scientific Committee (FSC) and the Threatened Species Scientific Committee (TSSC) in collaboration with stakeholders and were subject to public comment.

In 2015, the two JMAs were reviewed and replaced by a single JMA in accordance with s.221W(3) of the *Fisheries Management Act 1994*. The single JMA was jointly developed by the DPI and the EHG in consultation with the FSC and TSSC and was publicly exhibited in 2016, along with the associated Management Plan, before being adopted in 2017.

---

## What is the Management Plan?

The Management Plan sets out the operational means by which the SMP aim is pursued and continually refined.

The objectives of this Plan are to:

- Reduce the risk to humans from shark bites at beaches subject to the SMP,
- and, consistent with that objective:
- Minimise the impact on non-target species and to ensure that the SMP does not jeopardise the survival or conservation status of threatened species, populations and ecological communities, or cause species that are not threatened to become threatened;
  - Minimise work health and safety risks to contractors and agency personnel associated with implementing the SMP; and
  - Ensure that monitoring and reporting on the SMP is undertaken in a transparent manner.

---

## Review of the JMA and Management Plan

The JMA makes provision for 5-yearly reviews of the JMA, and if the review finds that the JMA needs amending, then a new JMA must be prepared and opened for comment by the Fisheries Scientific Committee, the Threatened Species Scientific Committee, and the public. In accordance with those provisions, in 2022 the 2017 JMA and Management Plan were reviewed by the DPI and EHG. There were no changes to the JMA however changes were made to the Management Plan.

Most of the changes to the Management Plan were minor administrative and definition changes, but also incorporated the recommendations from the 2021/22 Trigger Point Review. The Management Plan does not require public exhibition.

The EHG was consulted and involved in the development of the Management Plan. The Fisheries Scientific Committee and the Threatened Species Scientific Committee were also consulted and endorsed the implementation of the 2023 Management Plan.

---

## What happens next?

The 2023 Management Plan has now been endorsed by both Parties to the Agreement and is now being implemented concurrently with the existing 2017 JMA. The next 5-year review of the JMA will commence in June 2028 unless there is a need to amend the JMA beforehand.

---

## How do shark nets work?

These beaches are netted by contractors using specially designed meshing nets to reduce the chances of shark encounters.

The nets do not create a total barrier between swimmers and sharks. They are designed to intercept sharks near meshed beaches, which reduces the chance of a shark interaction.

While the nets cannot provide a guarantee that a shark interaction will never happen, we believe they have been effective in greatly reducing the potential number of interactions.

The nets are only deployed from September to April to avoid the majority of the whale migration season, and the nets are also fitted with acoustic devices known as 'whale alarms' and 'dolphin pingers', which are designed to

deter cetaceans away from the nets. The nets are also checked within 72 hours of the previous check, which has helped increase the overall proportion of animals released alive from 25% before the JMA to currently over 40%.

---

## Why are shark nets sometimes removed from the water?

In accordance with the JMA and Management Plan for the Shark Meshing Program, nets are deployed between 1 September to 30 April each year. Since 1989, nets have been removed from May-August to reduce risks of entanglement of migrating whales.

Shark nets may not be in place every day. In accordance with the Joint Management and the Management Plan that authorise the SMP, the nets can be removed when there are severe weather conditions, for example strong waves or currents. Nets may be removed from the water during severe weather conditions to reduce the chances of losing nets in the ocean. They are then replaced at the next available opportunity when conditions improve.

---

## Who decides which beaches are netted?

The Shark Meshing Program is managed in accordance with a Joint Management Agreement since 2009, and an associated Management Plan authorised by the *Fisheries Management Act 1994* and the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*. The existing suite of beaches have had SMP nets since 1985. There are 51 beaches between Newcastle and Wollongong with mesh nets.

---

## Why were the shark nets put back in September?

The current Program (2023/24) includes the continued deployment of shark nets across NSW from 1 September – 30 April while we continue to monitor the effectiveness of the program.

We are not ruling out any measures to keep our beaches safe. Nets have been part of measures for more than 70 years.

Last financial year (2022/23) was the first full season where SMART drumlines were set alongside most shark nets. It was also the first time where many council areas had shark mitigation measures in place. So, our approaches to protecting beachgoers is evolving.

The NSW Department of Primary Industries will consult with relevant local councils, and their communities, to better understand their preferences for shark management technologies, including SMART drumlines, drones and listening stations.

It is important to ensure the right mitigation measures are in place, at the right time, and to strike a reasonable balance, including the use of new technologies that not only protects beachgoers but also minimises the impact on marine life and ecosystems.

---

## Where can I get more information on the Shark Meshing Program?

Visit the SharkSmart website: [www.sharksmart.nsw.gov.au](http://www.sharksmart.nsw.gov.au)

---

©State of New South Wales through Department of Regional NSW 2023. The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing, October 2023. However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that the information upon which they rely is up to date and to check the currency of the information with the appropriate officer of Regional NSW or the user's independent adviser.

---